**The Nuts and Bolts of Hinduism**

Q. How old is Hinduism?

A. Although the date is in dispute, many scholars believe that Hinduism is approximately 5000 years old. This fact makes Hinduism unquestionably one of, if not the, oldest major world religion.

Q. Where did it originate?

A. Most scholars support the position that Hinduism started in the Punjab and Indus valleys, found in modern-day Pakistan.

Q. Who is the founder of Hinduism?

A. Hinduism does not really have a founder or a “father” associated with it.

Q. How many people practice Hinduism today?

A. Estimates vary, but most studies put the number of practicing Hindus at well over 800 million.

The vast majority of those living in India categorize themselves as Hindu.

Q. Do Hindus believe in a god?

A. The answer to this question is, "Yes."

Hindus believe in one God, Brahman, who is believed to be the father of everything including the eternal soul.

However, it is also believed that Brahman has three major manifestations to create, keep in order, and destroy the world. They are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

1. Brahma is different than Brahman. Brahma is the first god of the Hindu triumvirate. He is responsible for the creation of the world and all creatures. Today, he is honoured far less in India than the other gods because he has completed the role of creating the universe.
2. Vishnu serves as both the preserver and protector of the universe. Vishnu is in charge of bringing good to the world when it is truly needed. Hindus believe that Vishnu has experienced nine reincarnations; and that he will return once more close to the end of the world
3. Shiva is believed to be the god that destroys the universe in order to re-create it. Shiva is the third god of the Hindu triumvirate. In most traditions, the change Shiva brings is for goodness and to make the world a better place. Shiva has a direct impact on Indian culture through dance, which is an important cultural expression. Shiva is believed to be the master of dance.

Scholars continue to debate whether Hinduism should be considered monotheistic or polytheistic. Regardless, worshipping other gods are all vehicles towards Brahman.

Q. Does Hinduism have denominational divisions like other religions do?

A. Because Hinduism does not have a single leader or doctrine as a guiding force, any divisions would be only considered along the lines of which god is honoured. Regardless, all gods lead to Brahman.

Q. What do Hindus believe is the ultimate goal of human life?

A. Ultimately, Hindus hope to achieve *moksha* , which is the liberation from *samsara* or the cycle of rebirth.